

"The Song of the Sirens"

By DOROTHY SCARBOROUGH.

EDWARD LUCAS WHITE, author of *El Supremo* and *The Unwilling Vestal*, successful impressionistic historical novels presenting the life of Paraguay and of ancient Rome, now turns his talents to the short story. In this new volume, *The Song of the Sirens*, he brings together a dozen narratives of far countries and the dim past. Here he is less successful, for in a short tale it is more difficult to recreate remote scenes and incidents than in a novel, where there is more time in which to reproduce the atmosphere at it was.

The incidents in these studies seem veracious and such as might have happened long ago, or at least more than ordinary scholarship would be required to point out anachronisms. But the dialogue is in various cases inconsistently modern. It isn't likely that a daughter of antique Greece would speak of her father as Daddy and "dear old Dad," or call her lover "You awful child." The conversations have the colloquial character of present day speech, as where Caesar sneers at Clodius, "You'd be philandering around my wife if you dared. You, ready to risk anything, let alone everything, for her sake." And again, he calls him "You ninny!" In the same story Pompey's wife remarks, "One never does the sight-seeing that is easiest." But perhaps Mr. White seeks modern equivalents for Roman slang.

In every respect save in dialogue the verisimilitude is convincing. The descriptions are vivid and each detail of life is impressive.

The preface is the most interesting part of the book, for here the author analyzes his dream life, showing the genesis of the narratives in the collection. Their dream origin gives them a peculiar imaginative power, together with an unsubstantiality. White says:

"A day dreamer I have been from boyhood, haunted, no matter what my task, by imaginations, mostly approximating some form of fictitious narrative; imaginations beyond my power to banish and seldom entirely within my power to alter, modify or control.

"Besides, I have in my sleep dreamed many dreams which after waking I could remember; some dimly, vaguely or faintly; others clearly, vividly or intensely. A majority of these dreams have been such as come to most sleepers, but a minority have been such as visit few dreamers.

"Sometimes I wake with the most distinct recollection of a picture, definite and with a multitude of details. Such was the dream, on the night of February 17, 1906, in which I saw the vision on which is based the tale of *The Song of the Sirens*; saw it not as a painted picture, but as if I had been on the cross-trees of a vessel under that intense blue sky, gazing at the magic islet and its portentous occupants. The dream was more marvellous since there was nothing in literature or art suggesting anything which I beheld in that vision of the two living shapes."

Some of the stories possess considerable dramatic force, as *The Flambeau Bracket*, concerning which the writer says:

"Often I wake with the sensation of having just finished reading a book or story. Generally I can recall the form and appearance of the book and can almost see the last page, size, shape, quality of paper and kind of type, with every letter of the last sentence.

"Such a dream was that from which I woke shuddering, tingling with horror of the revelation at the end of *The Flambeau Bracket*, with the last three sentences of it, word for word as they stand in the story, branded on my sight. Yet I was not able to recall in its entirety the tale I had just read, for in the dream the whole action took place on the window-sill, and what was said and done there disclosed all that had gone before and implied unmistakably all that was to come

after. This superlative artistry I could not attain to in writing the tale."

Discova, which is the outstanding story in the book, owes its creation to a dream which recurred again and again, over a period of twelve years, coming sometimes twice weekly, sometimes only once in six months.

"*Discova* is told exactly as I dreamed it; the ending, from getting my eyes above the level of the windowsill, came once only. Three or four times the dream began with my escape from the massacre of my company in the wood; generally, however, it began when I awoke in the dark in the dream and saw the light twinkling far away across the valley. No existent path which my feet have trod is better known to me than that dream path. . . . But the climax of that dream amazed me even more than the climax of the tale will probably startle a sensitive reader. I, in my dream, did not read it; it happened to me. The diabolical ingenuity of it still gives me spinal intuitions."

These pictures and near pictures, to use the author's own term in another application, are interesting more from the standpoint of dream psychology than that of history or literature.

THE SONG OF THE SIRENS. By EDWARD LUCAS WHITE. E. P. Dutton & Co. \$1.90.

"A Daughter of Two Worlds"

A DAUGHTER OF TWO WORLDS, by Leroy Scott, is a fine mixture of love and crime. During its course three murders are accomplished, the heroine commits forgery twice and marries as often, disappearances are an everyday occurrence and the characters are forever clutching at one another's throats and threatening unutterable things. A shudder for every page is Mr. Scott's rule. He has the most enviable faculty of making all crimes appear justifiable—exactly what we would have done ourselves in the circumstances even to the blackest murder of Black Jerry. This delightful character is the proprietor of a low dance hall in New York and has the distinction of being the heroine's father. When his daughter Jennie is sixteen, still a child in fact with only one forgery to her credit, he decides that the dancing den is no place for her and enters her in a fashionable girls' school under an assumed name, having every confidence that she will eventually conquer her new world.

Mr. Scott shows great ability at characterization and a most ingenious imagination. Although his story follows a beaten track, it is so dexterously and dramatically handled as to bear telling again. The grim figure of Black Jerry is strongly drawn, Jennie's three lovers are varied and convincing, while Jennie herself is that felicitous combination of fun, beauty and talent native to melodrama. After she has conquered the new world the old one is seen to have followed her in its dogged way and to be about to confound her. It is enough to make you gnash your teeth and yet it develops for the best. With many a flourish of revolvers the story ends minus several of the original cast, it is true, but happily withal. It will give solid satisfaction to lovers of lurid sentimentality and curdling of the blood in the way of light reading, and there are many so addicted.

A DAUGHTER OF TWO WORLDS. By LEROY SCOTT. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. \$1.60.

"An American Poilu"

THE letters which have been put together to make *An American Poilu* were written between July 21, 1917, and November 18, 1918, by an American in his thirties who was first an orderly in the hospital at Neuilly. There he met a wounded French captain of infantry with whom he formed a strong friendship. As a result the American, E—— H——, obtained permission from the War Department to enlist in the French army and went to the front with his friend. In June, 1918, this American poilu won the Croix de Guerre; afterward he was again "cited" and when the war ended he was recovering from a shot which disabled both knees.

This American was evidently a man of sensitive and poetic temperament and his letters so reflect his accustomed dreams and his habitual elevation and refinement of poetic thought that any attempt to summarize them would be futile. Nor

would it be possible to do them justice by brief quotations. It is best simply to characterize them; and perhaps this may most adequately be done by repeating part of the introduction to the book, written by Sara Ware Bassett of Boston. She says of E—— H——:

"He was not a boy to be fascinated by the glamour of adventure; neither was he of the type to whose imagination a military career appealed. It was only his love for France and for his fellow man that lured him. . . . His modest delight in his Croix de Guerre and in his second citation is childlike in its wonder. 'I have been cited for the French Cross—I, who was never a soldier!' It was, as he said, 'the climax of the unexpected.' He alludes only sketchily, however, to the martial turmoil seething about him. Instead his letters are redolent with the perfume of gardens and rich with the kaleidoscopic hues of countryside, stream and woodland."

Which is all just and true. We may illustrate with two sentences from a letter written in hospital: "At 7 o'clock Grandmère will come in and twenty heads (some bandaged like badly wrapped mummies—an eye, a nose, 'en panne') will pop up from twenty cots and cry 'Bon jour, Grandmère.' Then the blessé nearest the window will reach out with a crutch and open the easement, and gold, dew, leaves, garden, morn, fragrance will rush in and chase the sleep out of the ward." . . . Those who look for the loveliness of life about them will be nourished by this book of letters.

AN AMERICAN POILU. By E—— H——. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. \$1.35.

"The Private Wire To Washington"

THE "man who stayed home" in war time has been made the hero of at least two plays since 1914, and in each case he did it voluntarily to play the spy. But the man who stays home in *The Private Wire to Washington* does so for not so laudable a reason and then turns secret service agent in an effort to get even with the persons who caused his undoing. Just what that reason was or who were the persons who caused Robert Winthrop to get into this mess this reporter declines to reveal here. Harold MacGrath's solution of the mystery is altogether too clever and too unexpected (granting its unreality) to be spoiled for the reader in advance. The events in the book surely do put Robert Winthrop in a very bad light, and on the day that Molly Ellis discovered Winthrop's spectacles were made of common glass things looked very dark for him indeed. For Winthrop let it be known he couldn't get into the army because his eyes were not up to the proper military standard.

Much of this is revealed through incidents occurring at the Ellis country place on the south shore of Long Island, where Ellis pere has a private wire to Washington installed. It is discovered that some one in the house is receiving messages from Washington that are used against the United States in the prosecution of the war. Every one takes a hand at finding out who uses the wire, but it is Robert Winthrop who really spots the receiver of information, aided by some secret service men who are the real thing. But this is not all. Having the men who transmitted the news to the enemy submarine lying off the coast was one thing; to "pot" the submarine was quite another. And here Robert Winthrop shone again. Only before he left on this most perilous stunt of all he had to write a letter to Molly setting himself straight, which letter forms the real clue to the plot. In this tale of action Mr. MacGrath has spun one of the best of all his yarns and one that has a "kick" at the end of a novel and quite unexpected character.

THE PRIVATE WIRE TO WASHINGTON. By HAROLD MACGRATH. Harper & Brothers. \$1.35.

"Phoebe"

By GRANT M. OVERTON.

IT would be pleasanter not to say anything at all about *Phoebe*. But *Phoebe* is by Eleanor Gates, who wrote *The Poor Little Rich Girl*, and people will be curious about it and wonder why we say nothing. So we had better say that Eleanor Gates has written another story about another poor little rich girl, only not so good; in fact, not good at all. This poor little rich girl is 14 years old and her father talks to her strangely.

"Well, you see," her father answered, "having you go this way spared your dear little heart. No good-byes or tears. But pretty soon Grandma's, with Uncle Bob, and Uncle John, and a big garden and a horse—"

"A horse?" marvelled Phoebe.

We cannot compass (ourselves) the picture of a 14-year-old in these days who would stand for that sort of thing; and even city children seldom marvel at the idea of a horse. Despite the triumphs of Henry Ford city children do not have to go to the zoo to see a horse. This passage is not a lapse. The author of *Phoebe* insists throughout upon a childishness that will excite bewilderment where it does not arouse scorn.

The story is all about the terrible tragedy of the 14-year-old when her father took her from her mother and her mother went to Reno (where she died); and the dreadful anxieties of Phoebe concerning a possible stepmother and the happy resolution of these matters. All that this 14-year-old knows about the world seems to have been gleaned from attendance at the movies, and surely never was a story in which the movies were mentioned so often and with such constant and uncritical rapture. William S. Hart could well afford to buy an edition of *Phoebe* and give it away to all his friends and enemies; it would be good advertising. Ourselves, we get immense delight out of young girl stories as written by such popular novelists as Gene Stratton-Porter and Eleanor Hallowell Abbott—but whatever may be said about the work of these writers it is not anemic. *Phoebe* is, quite painfully so.

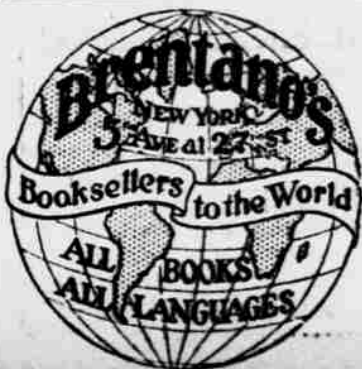
PHOEBE. By ELEANOR GATES. George Sully & Co. \$1.50.

"Green Valley"

QUITE the best thing about Katharine Reynolds's tale of *Green Valley* is the dedication, which is "To all the little one horse towns, where life is sweet and roomy and old fashioned; where the days are full of sunshine and rain and work; where neighbors really neighbor and men and women are life size." If this were followed by a real story it would have point as well as charm; but the book is not much more than an expansion of the dedication. There is here really no story. At the outset we meet the Young Man and the Young Woman; after a very few chapters they find themselves together in Green Valley, with neither rivalled in the attention of the other; and the reader settles down more or less patiently for the only predictable outcome of their pleasant proximity.

The Young Woman is the daughter of a diplomat, no less; the Young Man is the "last of the Churchills"—only his name happens to be John Roger Churchill Knight, for his father was a missionary in India, whose admirable devotion to his life work eventually killed his homesick wife. The reader may feel that the affair of Nanny Ainslee and the Rev. Mr. Knight is unduly retarded, but the reader will be conscious that the author does not feel that way. Her pages are filled with the life of Green Valley, a small Middle Western town, populated by—the people who inhabit such towns. There are the mean man, the town drunkard, the old lady who sets every one's affairs right.

GREEN VALLEY. By KATHARINE REYNOLDS. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. \$1.50.



The Crescent Moon

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